

# *When Your Son or Daughter Is Deployed*

## **Overview**

Ways to cope when your son or daughter is deployed

- Preparing for deployment
- Managing your emotions
- Staying in touch
- When your service member comes home

A son's or daughter's deployment can stir up conflicting emotions in a parent. While you are proud of your service member's accomplishments, you may be concerned for his or her safety, especially if the deployment is to an area of conflict. It's important to keep in mind that your son or daughter is capable, trained, and well equipped to carry out his or her mission. Also remember that the best thing you can do for your son or daughter is to offer your support and encouragement.

## **Preparing for deployment**

Before your son or daughter deploys discuss a plan for staying in touch. You should know:

- *The address to send letters and care packages.* The address should include your service member's full name (with or without rank or rating), unit, and APO/FPO (Air/Army Post Office or Fleet Post Office) address. Be sure you have the unit name, including the battalion, ship, squadron, platoon, etc.
- *Your service member's social security number.* Keep this handy in case you have to find your son or daughter in an emergency.
- *If your son or daughter will have e-mail access.* If so, don't expect instantaneous communication. Depending on where your service member is stationed, email may be sporadic.
- *Roughly how long before your letters and/or e-mails will be answered.* While it's impossible to say for certain, your service member may be able to tell you that he or she will be so busy during the first few weeks that there may be little time to write.
- *Whether you will receive phone calls, and if so, roughly how often and for how long.*
- *How you can get information about your son's or daughter's unit.* Find out from your service member's base command whether any of the following options are available to you:
  - *Command and unit newsletters.* These may be online or in hard copy. To be included on the distribution list, your service member will need to provide your information to his or her unit.
  - *Phone trees.* Volunteers at home pass along information to family members from the command.

- *Volunteer family support groups.* Each branch of the armed forces offers support networks for families, though support for parents of deployed service members varies according to the policies of the unit. Depending on your service member's branch, you may be able to receive information from the unit's Air Force Family Readiness Program, Army Family Readiness Group, Marine Corps Key Volunteer Network, or Navy Ombudsman or Family Support Groups.
- *Command and unit Web sites.* Many commands and units have their own Web sites, which may include videos and pictures.

If your service member is married, the service branch has an obligation only to communicate with his or her spouse, so you may have to get your information through your son- or daughter-in-law. Be aware that communication with your service member may be difficult for reasons including power outages, travel, and remote locations. Also, there may be limitations on what your service member can reveal to you, such as precise locations and activities. Remember, no news is often good news. Your service member may be wrapped up in mission operations and unable to communicate. In a serious emergency, the family will be notified through official channels.

### **Managing your emotions**

Even though your son or daughter is an adult, you are still his or her parent. It's natural to be concerned for your child's safety, especially when you don't know what he or she is doing.

- *Ask your service member to describe his or her assignment, if possible.* The unknown tends to make us anxious. It will help if you can picture your service member going about his or her daily routines.
- *Establish a support group of family and friends.* Being around people you care about and who care about you is comforting. Make sure there are people you can call when you are feeling sad or anxious. Try to spend time doing things you enjoy with people you like.
- *Find others in similar situations.* Friends and colleagues are important, but so is being in touch with people whose loved ones are also on military assignment. Talking with other parents in the same situation can be comforting and will allow you to share information. If you don't know anyone, contact the military and ask whether there's a support group in your area. There are some very popular online parent support groups as well, including Marine Parents ([www.marineparents.org](http://www.marineparents.org)).
- *Consider limiting your television news viewing if your service member is in an area of conflict.* You may feel more upset than informed by these reports.

- *If you hear or read something upsetting that you think your son or daughter may be involved with, call the family support center.* The people there will be able to give you more information or direct you to someone who can help.
- *Be sure you've discussed with your service member who he or she has designated as the communication point of contact for the unit or command.* If it's not you, be sure the point of contact has your contact information, including any addresses where you may be staying away from home. This way you know you'll be found without difficulty should something happen to your son or daughter.
- *Volunteer your time to causes near to your service member's heart.* Doing something you know would make your son or daughter proud is not only a good outlet for your emotions and energy, but it's a great way to show support for your service member. Help out at your son's or daughter's old high school or at the community youth center where he or she spent time after school. Volunteer at the local shelter if your son or daughter loves animals, or pitch in for a cause related to the armed forces. Here are some places to start:
  - The American Red Cross. Volunteer your time. Visit [www.redcross.org/donate/volunteer](http://www.redcross.org/donate/volunteer) to find the unit nearest you.
  - The Armed Services Blood Program. Give blood to the troops overseas. Find out where to donate at [www.militaryblood.dod.mil](http://www.militaryblood.dod.mil).
  - Department of Veterans Affairs Voluntary Service. Find out how to help veterans near you at [www1.va.gov/volunteer/](http://www1.va.gov/volunteer/).

### **Staying in touch**

Notes and goodies from home can be real morale lifters. Plan to send your service member a lot of mail.

- *Send care packages.* Be aware that there are certain things you cannot send, depending on where your service member is stationed. The United States Postal Service has a list of restrictions by zip code at [www.usps.com/cpim/ftp/bulletin/2003/html/pb22101/apofpo.html](http://www.usps.com/cpim/ftp/bulletin/2003/html/pb22101/apofpo.html).
- *Use reusable packing material.* Cushion fragile items with small packages of tissues, copies of the local newspaper, plastic, zipper-close bags filled with popped popcorn or anything else you can think of that your service member will be able to use.
- *Check the U.S. Postal Service site for packing tips.* ([www.usps.com/supportingourtroops/packagingtips.htm](http://www.usps.com/supportingourtroops/packagingtips.htm).)
- *Leave plenty of time for your care packages to arrive.* Visit the Military Postal Service Agencies to find out how long it will take letters and packages to arrive at their destination. <http://hqdainet.army.mil/mpsa/>.

- *Write letters.* Share everyday events, such as movies you saw, and updates on friends, family members, neighbors, and colleagues. This will help your service member feel connected to home and prepared for any changes that may occur during the deployment. It's always a good idea to number your letters. Due to the unit's operational requirements, your son or daughter may receive letters out of sequence and the numbering will help them figure out the correct order.
- *If there's a family emergency such as a death or serious illness, you may contact your service member through the American Red Cross.* Find your local chapter in the Yellow Pages or at the Web site [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org). When you call, have on hand your service member's full name, rank or rating, branch of service, social security number, military address, and information about the deployed unit and the home base unit.

### **When your service member comes home**

Your service member's return home from a deployment is cause for celebration. However, try to keep your expectations in check. Your son or daughter has had many different experiences since you were last together and may seem changed. Hopefully you kept up a steady flow of communication during the deployment so both of you will be prepared for any changes. Give your son or daughter plenty of time and space to reacquaint him or herself with home. If your service member is married, discuss homecoming plans with his or her spouse.

- *Let your service member set his or her own schedule.* If your service member is due home on leave, you'll probably want to celebrate with family and friends. Step back and let your service member do the planning. He or she may want only to catch up on sleep or spend time with friends.
- *Take your cues from your service member.* You may be full of questions, but your son or daughter may not be ready to talk about his or her deployment. Try not to press for information. Rather, be available when he or she is ready to talk.
- *If you are concerned about your service member's behavior, encourage him or her to seek help.* Your son or daughter may have seen combat or had other upsetting experiences while deployed. Some behavior changes to look out for include mood swings, sleep disturbances, rage, fear, trouble concentrating, and frequent, disturbing thoughts. This may be normal in the beginning, but cause for concern if the changes are severe or continue over time. If you have concerns, ask your service member to speak with a military chaplain, his or her base family center, or a One Source program counselor.

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